

The Role of Monks

Sobhenti Sutta (AN2, 16)

There are four groups of disciples gradually arose in the world as the result of the great service of the Buddha. They are;

1. monks (*Bhikku*)
2. nuns (*Bhikkunī*)
3. laymen (*Upāsaka*)
4. laywomen (*Upāsikā*)

The Buddha preached dhamma to them not only for attaining enlightenment, but also, to preach dhamma to others, handing dhamma over from generation to generation. The Supreme Buddha wanted his disciples to bring this valuable message for the wellbeing of many humans and deities. That's why the Buddha advised his first 60 noble disciples to travel from town-to-town preaching dhamma its beginning is excellent, the middle is excellent, the end is excellent.

Caratha Bhikkave cārikam bahujana hitāya bahujana sukkhāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānam, desetha bhikkave dhamma ādi kalyānam, majjhe kalyānam pariyosāne kalyānam...

It's evident that among the four groups of disciples the Buddha paid his special attention to the Bhikku, monks. There are few meanings of 'Bhikku' term. Basically, the meaning of 'Bhikku' is, he who sees the fear of the world or Samsāra. Furthermore, 'Bhikku' means he who begs for food. Also, 'Bhikku' means he who wears robes made by thrown away clothes.

The Saṅgha :-

As the result of appearing of the Buddha, we have received the precious triple gem; the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha. The Buddha means the Buddha's enlightenment. The Dhamma means the Buddha's sublime message. Saṅgha means the Buddha's noble disciples who attained and are attaining the levels of enlightenment from mundane level to supra-mundane level. The Saṅgha includes not only monks but also nuns and lay people who have already attained and are attaining enlightenment. When we go to the Saṅgha for refuge, our courage and faith increase a lot and, it is a good motivation to fulfill this message. If we know that there are people who get the results by practicing this message in the world, then we have confidence to go forward with courage to see the results within our lifetime.

Here we especially focus on monks who learn, practice and have been protecting this valuable message for more than 2500 years. One of the main qualities that monks have is that practice of the noble eightfold path. They manage their entire life according to the dhamma. Also, the Saṅgha is the supreme field of merits of the world. The World listens to the dhamma through the Saṅgha. Listening to dhamma helps us to recognize the Supreme Buddha. Hence Saṅgha is the live factor who links us to the dhamma and the Buddha.

Qualifications of Monks

According to the *Sobhenti Sutta*, it is very clear what the Buddha expected from his disciples.

*Bhikkhu, bhikkhave, viyatto vinīto visārado bahussuto dhammadharo
dhammānudhammappaṭipanno saṅghaṃ sobheti.*

A bhikkhu who is competent, disciplined, self-confident, learned well, an expert on the Dhamma, practicing in accordance with the Dhamma, adorns (beautifies) the Saṅgha.

The Buddha says if above four groups are competent, educated, assured, learned people—who have memorized the teachings and practice in line with the teachings, they beautify the Saṅgha. What four? A monk, a nun, a layman, and a laywoman.

Here, the Exalted One explains six qualities which the Bhikkus should have. They are;

1. *Viyatto* - competent
2. *Vinīto* - disciplined
3. *visārado* - confident
4. *Bahussuto* – educated
5. *Dhammadharo* - memorized
6. *Dhammānudhammappaṭipanno* - practiced

He who has these qualities in his character beautifies the Saṅgha. If a monk can complete these qualities as the Buddha said, he is able to achieve the results of Dhamma, can solve any questions of dhamma without fear and shame and is able to hand this message over to the next generation. That's why the Buddha always appreciated monks who have above qualities.

Main Duties of Monks

We have recognized four main duties of monks. They are;

1. Learning Dhamma
2. Practicing Dhamma
3. Propagating (Spreading) Dhamma
4. Preserving (Protecting) Dhamma

Learning dhamma which helps monks to achieve spiritual goals and to preach dhamma to the world is a main duty of a monk. Therefore, the Supreme Buddha often encouraged monks to learn dhamma well. Associating good friends, listening to dhamma carefully and reading Tipitaka, monks are able to improve their dhamma knowledge for the benefit of themselves and others. Here the usage of Tipitaka; Vinaya, Sutta and Abhidhamma in Pali language is very important. Further, the core teachings in Buddhism such as the Four Noble Truths, the Dependent Origination, the Five Aggregates, the Three Characteristics of existence should be addressed clearly. Five qualities consist of learning dhamma. They are;

1. *Sutā* – Listening Dhamma
2. *Dhatā* – Memorizing Dhamma
3. *Vacasā paricitā* – Practicing Dhamma by words
4. *Manasānupekkitā* – Reflecting Dhamma
5. *Ditthiyāsuppatividdhā* - Clearing vision through Dhamma

As monks we have more responsibility for Dhamma not just listening or practicing, but as monks who are responsible persons who protect and bring this message to the next generation.

Not only learning and memorizing Dhamma, but practicing dhamma is also a very important part of being a monk. According to what monks learned, we have to practice this rare and valuable message to the maximum level according to our knowledge, courage and wisdom. Here, we have to practice the Noble Eightfold Path in Short tranquility and wisdom in very short Mindfulness. Here it is very important to understand that **three doctrines in Buddhism should be together realized when we practice Dhamma. They are; the Four Noble Truths, the Dependent Origination and the Five aggregates.**

One of the main parts, the Buddha wished from monks is to preach this message to the world as it is. While we monks are practicing this message, we have to transfer this message to others kindly wishing for their wellbeing of this life and hereafter. Giving dhamma is the highest gift. The gift of dhamma excels all other gifts. When lay people take care of monks with four requisites, the duty of monks is that explaining Dhamma to people compassionately.

Further, monks should guide the next generation based on dhamma. According to *Makhādeva Sutta*, the Buddha emphasized to monks very clearly not be the last persons in the dispensation of the Buddha. It means monks should not allow this message to be destroyed in their lifetime. The main purpose of establishing the *Sāsana* by the Worthy One was to pass his noble message from generation to generation for the wellbeing of many deities and men.

The duty of a monk is to do these four things as much as possible. First, we monks need to learn very clearly what the Buddha taught. The message, the Buddha explained for 45 years can be summarized into two. **They are the path to heaven (or a blissful life) and the path to deliverance.** With the understanding of the Karmic Law, practicing three meritorious deeds; *dāna*, *sīla* and *Bhāvanā* is the path to heaven or a blissful life. Not only we should do these three, but we have to contemplate them repeatedly. The practice of three trainings; *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* with the understanding of the dependent origination is the path to deliverance, emancipation or Nibbana. Among these three things wisdom or right understanding plays a main role since vision should be first. At the beginning of the path of liberation, the disciple should have a clear understanding about the dependent origination or about the arising and ceasing of the five aggregates.

When someone learns what the Buddha taught, especially his confidence in the Buddha's enlightenment (*Saddhā*) gradually increases. *Saddhā* or confidence in the Buddha is a main quality of a disciple. That's why the Buddha says confidence as the seed of wholesomeness (*Saddhā Bījam*). Here, the disciple has confidence in the Buddha's message that whatever he does for happiness among them practicing dhamma is mostly with visible results and

immediately effective. With this confidence he gives the priority in his life to practice dhamma with the fullest capability. The more he has confidence in what the Buddha taught, the more effort or inner motivation (*Viriya*), mindfulness (*Sati*), concentration (*Samādhi*) and wisdom (*Pannā*) develop. These five are the spiritual faculties which help us to complete the enlightenment.

The Qualities of the real monks' friend

According to the *Bhikkumitta sutta* (AN), the Buddha explains the qualities of a monks' friend.

Mendicants, when a friend has seven qualities you should associate with, accompany, and attend them, even if they send you away. What seven? They're likable, agreeable, respected, and admired. They admonish you and they accept admonishment. They speak on deep matters. And they don't urge you to do bad things. When a friend has these seven qualities you should associate with, accompany, and attend them, even if they send you away.

*Piyo ca garu bhāvanīyo,
vattā ca vacanakkhamo;
Gambhīrañca katham kattā,
no caṭṭhāne niyojako.* (Bhikkumittasutta, AN4, 332p)

They're pleasant, respected, and admired,
an admonisher who accepts admonishment,
speaks on deep matters,
and doesn't urge you to do bad.

The Buddha points out here seven qualities of a monks' good friend. They are;

1. *Piyo* – Pleasant
2. *Garu* – Respected
3. *Bhāvanīyo* - Admired
4. *Vattā* – Admonisher
5. *Vacanakkhamo* – Admonishment (patience in cruel words)
6. *Gambhīrañca katham kattā* – Speaks on Deep Matters
7. *Nocaṭṭhāne niyojaye* – Doesn't Urge You to Do Bad

Virtue (*Sīla*)

Discipline in speech and behavior or virtue (*Sīla*) is the foundation of the spiritual path. Hence, the Buddha frequently points out the value of virtue or moral conduct. *Ākankeyya Sutta* explains many benefits of virtue. From having material facilities to achieving the final goal,

liberation, practicing virtue helps us to achieve wishes. As a disciple who wishes to attain enlightenment should see the fear of doing any wrong conduct which is concerned by the wise. The Buddha advises Bhante Rahula, when we do something physically or verbally to reflect on it again and again whether it is correct. When we follow the path of liberation, we are able to see the visible results of practicing moral conduct. Disciple helps concentration, and concentration helps wisdom. These three qualities are interrelated.

How to become a successful soldier in the spiritual way

According to the *Pathamayodhājīva Sutta*, the Buddha explains the five kinds of soldiers, and they are compared to monks. There the Buddha encourages monks to eradicate defilements like a successful soldier who wins the war defeating enemies. The real enemies who disturb our peace of mind are negativities which are craving, anger and delusion. Defeating our inner enemies is more important than defeating thousands of enemies in the battle field.

Assimilation to the new environment

As the monks who are in the western world, we monks have to develop some skills and knowledge within us.

1. Language fluency
2. Social skills
3. Knowledge of new technology
4. Knowledge of new subjects like psychology, counselling, psychiatry
5. Understanding the cultural differences

In the current world, the main problem is that mental illness. That's more dangerous than physical illnesses. Here, a lot of counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists recommend their clients to practice loving kindness and mindfulness meditation as treatments. Having and practicing the Buddha's message monks can do a great service to the world using some techniques in Buddhism like virtue, loving kindness meditation and mindfulness etc. According to Emotional Quotient (EQ), five qualities should be practiced by a person who needs to make a successful personality. They are;

1. Self-awareness
2. Self-regulation
3. Inner motivation
4. Empathy
5. Social skills

Having this knowledge monks also can develop their skills to succeed their ministry.

Some examples given by the Buddha to the monks

The Buddha advises monks to be a moon. Moon is always pleasant, new and far, but appears like near. If monks are like that they can deal with lay people with less problems. Also, the Worthy One says to monks to be like a new wife who has moral fear, respects others and doesn't condemn others. Further, the Buddha guides monks to be aware of lay people just like peeping to an old well. When someone peeps at an old well, he does it very carefully keeping his body back. Monks also should behave like that, when they associate with lay people. Then monks are able to fulfill their spiritual goals successfully.

The great disciples; Arahāt Sāriputta and Arahāt Moggallāna are the examples given by the Blessed One to monks to follow (*Ekaṃputta Sutta*). They always acted for the wellbeing of many monks with compassion and wisdom (*Cunda Sutta*). Hence Bhante Sāriputta and Moggallāna are monks' heroes of our spiritual world. As monks we often should learn and think about their qualities as much as we can.

The Field of the Disciples' Spiritual Father

Having good discipline as monks according to what the Buddha taught, practicing the highest doctrine is the main duty. Even though the Blessed One explained many doctrines, finally, we have to practice only one which is mindfulness which consists of all the doctrines that the Buddha explained for 45 years. That's why the Buddha always encouraged his disciples to live in the field of the father which is mindfulness (*gocare bhikkhave caratha Sake pettike visaye*). Practicing mindfulness is the only way for the purification of beings, for destruction of sorrow and lamentation, for the overcoming of pain and grief, for the gaining knowledge, for the attaining enlightenment. For that let's dedicate our maximum effort day and night for our entire life.

If anyone can follow this path, he is an honorable person among deities and men as well. **The order of the blessed one's disciples is practicing well, rightly, correctly, properly. They are worthy of offerings and hospitality, worthy of gifts and salutation and the supreme field of merits for the world.**

As the result of practicing the Buddhist path, we monks are able to make a refuge within us, and are able to develop our inner peace. When monks are content, we are able to enhance our service to the world and pass this valuable message to the next generation too.



May the Triple Gem Bless you!

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